



The International Fancy Guppy Association



Dedicated to Promoting The Fancy Guppy Hobby

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Fighting Guppy Disease

By Stan Shubel

A couple of years ago fish that I had sent to a show came back looking to be in pretty good shape. After three days in a quarantine tank that had been treated lightly with medication, the fish were returned to their respective tanks. The following day I noticed a few of the fish hanging near the top of a tank and figured they were still a little stressed from their trip so I didn't pay too much attention.

The next day while feeding the fish I noticed some fish in other tanks where I had replaced the returned ones were acting strange and some of the tails were starting to clamp up. Still not overly concerned I added Betta Max to some of the tanks and formaldehyde with acriflavine to the others. When I went down to feed the fish I expected to see some slight improvement, instead, fish in other parts of the fish room were showing signs of whatever kind of disease it was that had hit the other tanks. Normally, tanks that are right next to an infected tank may possibly become infected by water being splashed by cats coming to the top of the water or by bubbles generated by the filters. However, in this case, tanks that were not in close proximity were showing signs of the disease.

I added more medication and started changing 50% of the water in the infected tanks. I sterilized all of the hoses I used with Clorox, rinsing them thoroughly with water. In a couple more days it seemed as though half the tanks in my fish room had sick fish in them with varying stages of the disease. Even with the increased medications and water changes there seemed to be little or no improvement.

Rather than concentrate on using just the two medications, I tried a number of different ones singularly and in combination. Sadly to say, the fish were still dying.

At this point, I had almost become convinced that it was some type of virus due to the negative response to any of the medications I was using. Hoping that the disease might be some form of airborne bacteria, I tried using different types of antibiotics. All that happened was that the water turned foul as the good bacteria balance was upset in the tanks. None of the antibiotics I used had any effect on the disease.

I started changing 50% of the water in the diseased tanks every other day in the hope that this would somehow dilute or, at least, modify the cycle of the disease. Still no improvement. More fish were becoming sick and dying everyday. Many diseases attack either young or old fish. This one was hitting all age groups. Occasionally, when I combine males of different strains in a single tank, one may be weaker and prone to certain disease whereas the others stay healthy. With this disease everything got sick and usually died in a short period of time.

I had a man come down from Michigan State to check out the fish. After doing some microscopic studies, he noticed some secondary bacterial infections, but couldn't say what the original problem was. He had no suggestions beyond what I was already doing. Subsequent tests were the same. I had the shrimp eggs checked out - negative. Frank Barta had my dry food tested by the State of Illinois with no problems found.

By this time I had been receiving phone calls from all over the country from breeders having the same problem. At this point there wasn't much I could offer them in the ways of suggestions for treatment.

As diseases became more exotic in nature and fail to respond to the medications that we have available, effective treatment is difficult, and, unless you are a trained specialist and have the necessary equipment to identify a specific disease, it's almost like a crap shoot, you guess at the disease and treat it the best way you can.

The only advantage I have over many of the breeders is the length of time I have been raising guppies and the various diseases I have encountered over the years. When I started with fish about the only thing I had to work with was salt and methylene blue. But back then diseases and life were much simpler. It's funny, as we evolve and get more knowledgeable, so do our diseases and problems change and get tougher.

As the disease was not responding to any of the bacterial medications I was using, I thought on the outside chance it might be some form of fungus so I would try treatment for that. I used several medications, including binox which is strong but usually very effective, same results, even with water changes.

Next came heavy doses of salt and copper sulfate with no real improvement, although the disease seemed to be somewhat weaker at this stage. At least the fish were not dying quite so fast. Once when the disease was in full bloom, I took one drop of water from a diseased tank and put it in a healthy 5 gallon tank of fish. Within 24 hours fish in this tank were dying; strong stuff.

By now I was wearing rubber gloves when working around the tanks, rinsing them off with Clorox and water between tanks. I called Jim Alderson to see if he had any idea what disease I was trying to control. Jim knows about four times as much as I do about fish disease so he was about my last hope. From the way I described my problems he thought it was columnaris or possible a virus. I treated the fish with triple sulfa and nitro furazone, same results - nothing.



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the disease started winding down and I was using what I had learned from the forum and the Super Velvet Plus. My tanks have been disease free for over six months, but I still observe the fish much more closely than I used to. Before the onset of this disease I used to take a filter from a working conditioned tank to set up a fresh tank with unconditioned water. Now because of the disease? after I have cleaned a tank, I use all fresh water and a clean filter with marbles and filter floss. To the water I add a tablespoon or so of solar salt and some A.B.A. or Fresh Start or some other water conditioner. The filter is run 24 hours and fish placed directly into the tank, no aged water or water from another tank is used.

So far everything is working fine and most of the lines are back close to where they were before being hit by this disease. I'm keeping my fingers crossed.

I would like to thank everyone for the kind words about my book. It was written for the beginner and mid level breeder in mind. After it was published, thanks mainly to Mary Sweeney of T.F.H., I wished I had put more detailed information into it, but at the time it seemed adequate, so I apologize to the advanced breeder, but you guys know it all already. Anyway, I'm still not exactly sure what the disease was, but it does respond to treatment, so maybe Jim was right about the bacterial disease.

Mr. Shubel has updated this article as of January 2006 with the note below for this republication.

As a follow up to the above article on disease. I have been using with very good results what I call "Shubel Cocktail" for a variety of diseases. It consists of 12 drops of Quick Cure, 12 drops of Super Velvet Plus and 2 tablespoons of solar salt to 10 gallons of tank water. After three days I repeat the Quick Cure. I then usually wait three more days and go back to my regular water changes. Normally the majority of the fish will be symptom free at this time, but occasionally I have had to repeat the treatment to clear the problem up.

It should be noted that it is advisable to reduce the amount of food, or stop feeding of the fish once the medicaments have been added to the tank. Normally the fish when effected by pathogens will stop feeding, at least most of them do. So if you continue your normal growth feeding practices you will really upset the bacterial balance in the tank, in addition to that already disturbed by the chemical treatment you have applied. It is defiantly not a good idea to change the filter when treating fish as this will further shock the fish. With any treatment it seems you will loose a percentage of the fish. I believe this is normal as some are in a weakened condition, and no matter what you do or don't do they will likely die anyway. At the first sign of distress or lack of feeding interest I apply the "cocktail mix". It may discolor the tank for a few days, but the sight of active swimming and eating fish makes it worth while.

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Filtration

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